

One Nation Under Surveillance

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Stepping through Hong Kong's gateway to China, in Shenzhen's Huanggang Port Control Point, travelers are immediately under close surveillance of a dozen cameras which hang from the ceiling.

On their way from the control point to the nearby bus stop, they are watched by dozens more surveillance cameras installed outside buildings, around street corners, or on traffic lights.

In fact, their entire stay in Shenzhen may be monitored by cameras in hotels, shopping malls, theaters, buses, street corners, and even small mom-and-pop stores.

Shenzhen, China's first Special Economic Zone, has once again become an experimental ground. This time, instead of trying its hand with liberal economic policies, China's communist regime is putting a new surveillance network through its paces.

Today 800,000 surveillance cameras are watching Shenzhen's 12 million residents, an average of one camera for every 15 people.

According to Shenzhen Economic Daily, cameras are systematically installed to monitor city and district borders, main roads and highways, subway stations, government agencies, educational institutions, TV and radio stations, residential areas, and other "critical" locations. Over 650 other cities in China are also under the close watch of the regime's all-seeing eye. The surveillance network has drawn criticism from the grassroots.

Inflaming the issue has been several disclosures of surveillance camera abuse that have raised heated Internet discussion about the regime's infringements on privacy.

A video clip of a kissing couple taken by a Shanghai subway surveillance camera was published on a public website in January. A traffic camera in Shenzhen was videotaping private residences every night and broadcasting the video live on the municipal government website.

Beijing took the surveillance a step further before the 2008 Olympics by installing GPS-tagging microphones in the city's some 70,000 taxis. The microphones can be remotely activated without the driver's knowledge for a live listen. The system also allows police to shut down the vehicle's engine whenever they choose to.

All these are a part of nationwide high-tech surveillance and censorship government program named the "Golden Shield Project," part of which on the Chinese internet has the nickname of "the [Great Firewall of China](#)."

The project aims to "integrate a gigantic online database with an all-encompassing surveillance network – incorporating speech and face recognition, closed-circuit television, smart cards, credit records, and Internet surveillance technologies," according to a report by Greg Walton of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.

Since the project's commencement in 2003, China's surveillance industry has been growing by 30 to 40 percent annually, with the market size reaching RMB 17.8 billion (US\$2.6 billion) in 2007, according to a report titled 2008 Global and China Visual Surveillance System Market Research and 2009-2013 Market Predication from China Commercial Information Net.

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